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# The Workshop

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### THE PORCELAIN OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.\*

HIRSCHVOGEL. — HENRI II WORKS. — PALISSY

By JACOB FALKE.

It is not, however, only the plastic and architectonic structure, with its ever varying forms, which gives such an appearance of richness to the Henri II vessels: much is due to the color also, for every one of them is covered with ornaments, almost all of which, even to the plastic additions, are colored. In this there is again a peculiarity both technical and artistic, which distinguishes the Henri II vessels in the most striking manner from all other similar productions. These ornaments are entirely of Arabo-moorish, or at least, of oriental origin, consisting of rich arabesques flowing through and filling compartments formed of greater and broader bands. Such ornaments found their way, in the sixteenth century, from the oriental art, into the armour and other metal works of the Renaissance, and were much used by armourers and goldsmiths, but more especially by bookbinders, who employed them for the decoration of their leather covers, with impressed gold to increase the richness of their appearance. They are however never found, at that period at least, in vessels of glazed terra cotta.

If this peculiarity is remarkable, still more so is the process by which these ornaments are added to the original material. This consists of a yellowish white clay which, as is the case with the majolicas, is overspread by a thin layer of finer and whiter earth. Now the ornaments are not painted on this layer, but the lines are sharply excised by a pointed instrument, and the excisions again filled up by a different colored earth, the color of which, as well as of the original material, is preserved under a thin, transparent lead varnish. The process is sometimes reversed, the whole of the upper layer, except only the ornamental lines which re-

main as contours, being removed, and replaced by earth of a different color from the rest. By this second process, the ornaments are shown light on a dark ground, while, by the former, the case is reversed. The colored earth is either dark brown or vermillion, the other colors, which occur with it, such as green and blue, appear to be brought out by colored glaze. This peculiarity in the technical process reminds us of the *sgraffito* of the mural decorations of Italy, but has no counterpart in the earthenware manufactures of that period, though in those of the middle ages and the east we find something similar. Again we may view it in connexion with the goldsmith's art, and it will remind us of the process of damascening, which inlays one metal in another, as for example, silver and gold in iron; or of the *Niello*, which fills up deeply engraved line, with a bright black substance.

All these peculiarities will naturally excite the interest of the amateur in art, which when once awakened, will lead him to further inquiries. Whence and when did these objects originally come? who was the originator of them? Historians being silent on these subjects, we must look into the question for ourselves.

In one respect, as to the time, that is, of their production, they furnish an answer by themselves, for there cannot exist the least doubt among connoisseurs that they belong to the period of the Renaissance, and indeed to the sixteenth century. They bear also other characteristic marks, which still more closely denote the time of their origin. A great number of them bear the cipher of King Henri II of France, or the well known mark of his mistress Diana of Poitiers, three intertwined half moons; others have also the arms and lilies of France. Hence some have concluded that the whole collection must have belonged to a service which the king had

\* Continued from page 1 *ante*.

ordered as a present to his favorite. This conclusion however can hardly be sustained, as one piece has been preserved which shows the symbol of Francis I, a salamander in flames, and a few others have the arms of the Montmorenci family. The date of their origin therefore can only be stated with any degree of certainty, as between the years 1530 and 1560.

If we inquire further as to the locality from whence these objects came, we may for the most part refer them to one spot, from whence they found their way into the hands of amateurs; namely the Touraine, but particularly Tours and Thouars; and with this result we must for the present content ourselves.

Freer scope is then afforded for the formation of hypotheses. Were these productions Italian or French? and who of known artists could have been their author? One of the specimens has certainly a figure like an artist's mark, but not a single letter as to its meaning, so that the enigma is only rendered more difficult of solution. Another shows a G in many ornamental repetitions, but this certainly does not point us to the artist. Still some have attempted to identify him from this cipher. One of the great nephews of Luca della Robbia, Girolamo by name had come to Paris, had undertaken some works for Francis I, and had designed the ornaments in terra cotta for the smaller palace at Madrid. He is said to have gone afterwards to the south of France and to have produced some works there. So on him fell the suspicion of being the author of these creations. This suspicion however met with little credence, as it must be confessed that the works of della Robbia are very different in style and form from the Henri II vessels.

Others, with the conviction that these productions, apart from the material, have more resemblance to the work of the goldsmith than the potter, have insisted that their author must have been a goldsmith, and they also soon found a fitting object on whom to fasten their suspicions. Benvenuto Cellini, on his last return to Italy, had left behind a very clever assistant, whom he highly esteemed, a young Neapolitan of the name of Ascanio, who finished his works, and executed some new ones by order of the king. An affair of honor compelled him to leave Paris in haste, and to remain in concealment. In his flight he came upon a poor cottage on the banks of the Loire, inhabited by a potter who received him kindly: but Ascanio found more than an asylum in the cottage; he met the beautiful daughter of his host, and captivated by her charms, he remained there several years. During this time he is supposed to have finished, with the assistance of the father, those works, which according to all appearance, proceed from the hands of an experienced goldsmith.

This well conceived fable, which only seemed wanting to increase the mystery of the Henri II vessels, and to add to it the element of romance, met indeed with some applause, but little credence, and by no means completed the ranks of the dealers in hypothesis. The goldsmith theory was rejected with the story, and then there came

the only idea which remained to be ventilated, namely that the author must have been a person who in some way or other was connected with books, either a typographer, and there was little difficulty in fixing upon some celebrated printer of the time, or a bookbinder or librarian, since the arabesques on these vessels bore a perfect resemblance to the ornaments on the covers of books, and it often seemed as if the very stamp of the bookbinder had been impressed upon them. It could not however be to any unknown or unimportant personage that such works as the Henri II vessels could be attributed, for their artistic value is by no means small, and they afford evidence of the most refined and cultivated taste.

This last supposition has received a remarkable and unexpected confirmation. A savant of Poitiers, Fillon by name, has solved the mystery of this archæological Sphinx, or at least is supposed to have solved it. An escutcheon in some book put him on the scent, and led him to the castle of Oiron in the neighbourhood of Thouars, a locality which we have already seen to be the birth place of these vessels. This castle belonged formerly to the family Gouffier, the most illustrious member of which was Claude Gouffier who fought by the side of Francis I at the battle of Pavia, was afterwards a friend of Henri II, and in 1548 became Grand Equerry of France. He bore also the title of Marquis of Caravas, and enjoys the honorable distinction of being the original of the still more celebrated Marquis of Carabas in the world-renowned fairy tale of Puss in boots. Claude was also a great lover of art, and converted the castle of Oiron into a magnificent residence with the aid of numerous artists whom he employed in its restoration.

But it was not exactly to Claude that the discoveries and researches of Fillon pointed, as the author of the Henri II vessels, but to his mother. Artus Gouffier, Claude's father, tutor to Francis I, died in 1519 leaving a widow, Helen of Hangest-Genlis to whose care the childhood of Henry II was intrusted. From several documents which Fillon discovered, he came to the conclusion that she was the originator as to their spirit of these celebrated vessels, but that the artists who executed them for her were her librarian Jean Bernard, who designed also the decorations of her bookcovers, and a potter of Oiron, Francois Charpentier by name, who was in the service of the same noble lady. After her death, which took place in 1537, the manufacture must have been continued under her son.

Through this unusual kind of origin many of the phenomena attaching to these productions may be explained; particularly the mystery which till then rested on them; and the repeated use of the letter G in the decoration of one of the vessels may well betoken the name of Gauffier. The intimate connexion also which existed between that family and the two sovereigns, especially Henri II, point out, at least, how this mark and the royal arms may have come to be united on these vessels. Still all doubts are not thus solved, so

that even this explanation does not meet with universal acceptance. In the mean while, however, until we meet with evidences of a different kind, we must content ourselves with this as the best and commonest solution. We will therefore raise no further question on this point, but turn our attention to the second and no less peculiar production of French porcelain, namely that of Bernard Palissy.

Bernard Palissy, glass maker and glass painter, geographer, chemist, geologist, painter, potter, gardener, historian, and many things besides is a remarkable parallel to Augustin Hirschvogel, and like him a worthy son of his age, the Renaissance period, and stands at the threshold of modern ideas and actions. Imbued with the reigning spirit of restlessness, he, like Hirschvogel, was induced to travel, but more from that invincible spirit of inquiry which was the characteristic of the sixteenth century, which panted to extricate science from the mystical clouds of the middle ages and from the wonders and fantasies of alchemy, and to press forward to new discoveries. Like Archimedes, he could brood over the solution of his problem, while the world around him was in flames, and hunger, want and misery stood before him in all their terrible reality.

Palissy has himself given us some insight into the incidents of his life, but much obscurity hangs over his birth and early youth. He appears to have been born in the year 1510 in the diocese of Agen in the department of the Dordogne in France. It is said that a geometer, who happened to come that way, and was charmed with the boy's appearance and intelligence, took Bernard away with him and instructed him in his profession. But it is more probable that Palissy acquired, in his father's house, all those branches of education which were then most common, adding to them drawing, mathematics and geometry, and lastly land surveying. He did not however choose the profession of a land surveyor as his proper vocation, but that of a glass painter, including the art of staining and painting on glass, and the cutting and making the design. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the churches, castles and dwelling houses of rich proprietors offered many opportunities for the glass painter to exhibit his genius.

But Palissy, intent on observing and learning, was determined to see the world. Scarcely therefore had he become an accomplished artist, when he quitted his native place, and travelled from place to place over a great part of France, particularly the south, living probably upon the proceeds of his labors in his art. He did not yet penetrate into Germany as is supposed. He visited the laboratories of Chemists and Alchemists, the cabinets of the learned, made observations of the phenomena of nature, studied the properties of the earth, of the warm springs and baths in the Pyrenees, paid attention to forestry, and displayed moreover in his keen perception, an exalted spirit of inquiry which occasionally amused itself with the mystical extravagancies of a Paracelsus.

After these journeys, of whose duration we know nothing, he settled at Saintes on the Charente in Sain-

tonge. Here he found plenty of employment. Sometimes he practised as a landsurveyor, made plans of many estates in the neighbourhood as a sworn surveyor, and in 1544 received from the Government the commission to assess the saltmines on the coast. This gave occasion for fresh journeys, new observations and geological experiments, in consequence of which he projected a scheme for supplying the town of Hiers with spring water, a project which was afterwards executed in the time of Richelieu. In Saintes also he married, and soon found himself surrounded by an increasing family for whose support he was compelled to have recourse both to his land surveying and glass painting.

It was about the year 1540, or according to the opinion of others, some ten years later, when an apparently trifling circumstance made the way for an alteration in his course of life. By accident there fell into his hands a vessel of enamelled clay of such wondrous beauty that it took entire possession of his senses, and he thought within himself, as there was then no more great demand for glass painting, that if he could discover the secret of the enamel, he could himself make quite as beautiful a vessel. "From that moment," he tells us "without any thought of my total ignorance in the matter of earthenware, I set myself to the task of finding the enamel like a man groping in the dark."

It is difficult to say, and indeed it is of small importance, whence this vessel came, which produced such a transformation in the painter and geometer. Some imagine that it was a piece of German workmanship by Hirschvogel, but probably Palissy did not come into Germany till later; moreover the Nuremberg works were of a dark ground, while we see him seeking the vessel of the white glaze under the impression that the coloring would be easy. Others conclude that it must have been certainly a specimen of the Henri II work that he had seen. Though in these vessels the glazing is the least remarkable quality, some of them are ornamented with the figures of animals, like the earliest productions of Palissy. The white glaze leads us in the first place to the Italian majolicas with which he might very easily have become acquainted as the noble families of the neighbourhood, with whom he had intercourse, were connected with the court of Ferrara.

Be this as it may, the enamelled vessel had at once exercised a magical influence over him, and had become his fixed idea, so that he thought of nothing else till he had found what he sought. What a life then was his, a life of care and anxiety for fifteen long years! He neglected his business, became involved in debt, wandered about with uncertain steps, miserable, haggard and in rags. As he returned home from his furnace, he encountered the careworn faces of those who belonged to him, the reproaches of his wife, the cries of his famished children. As he wandered in his wretchedness through the streets, the women pointed at him crying, "look, there is Master Bernard, who leaves his wife and children to starve, while he is coining false money", and the ragamuffins of the street cry after him "Master Bernard

the fool". But the stoic bears all, reproaches, revilings, poverty. He thinks only of the goal, and has confidence in himself and trust in God.

According to his own account, and as we judge too from his proceedings, he was entirely ignorant of the potter's art, knowing nothing either of the earths, or of the usual glaze, or of the process of execution. He now buys a number of earthenware pots, breaks them in pieces, numbering particularly each separate piece, and smears them over with different preparations of his own devising and constructs his own furnace. But he is ignorant of the strength and duration of his fire, so that at one time it consumes his glaze, at another time it is too weak. He never arrives at a smelting point. He attributes the fault, probably without reason, to his materials. With these experiments, the year comes to an end. Then he recommences in a different manner. He again buys a number of pots, smears from three to four hundred pieces with his preparations and prevails on some potters to burn them together with their own vessels. By this means he saves, at all events, the expense of fire, but the potter's fire is too feeble. All his experiments, repeated again and again, are attended with no result.

Wearied out, he returns to his land surveying. It is at this time that he receives from the Government the commission to register the salt mines. As soon as he has completed this work, and gained a little money, he returns again to his fixed idea, and renews most strenuously his search for the Enamel.

He has now learnt that the potter's furnace is too weak; so after preparing hundreds of new earthenware vessels, he exposes them again and again to the fires of the glass-melters. He watches the brand day and night; at last to his indescribable joy he sees one part of his preparations molten, though but imperfectly, and he has at least the satisfaction of feeling that he is now on the right path to success. Poor as this result is,

it inspires him with fresh hope and courage. For two years more he casts potsherd on potsherd into the glass furnace without making any further progress. Then he experiments, almost in despair, determined that this shall be his last attempt, with three hundred pieces, and lo! one of them appears molten, white and shining, a wonderful success.

He seems now to be approaching the goal: but now, what might have been mere accident, he seeks to establish by fresh experiments, and instead of sherds and fragments, he will subject entire vessels to the proof. So again he constructs his own furnace. Being wholly without funds, he is obliged himself to procure the bricks and the mortar, to fetch the water, and do the part of a common bricklayer. The vessels also he has to make himself, for he has no money to purchase any. After incessant toil for eight months, the furnace and the vessels are ready, and he has now to prepare his enamel out of the materials from which he had succeeded in obtaining the white fusion in the glass furnace.

At length all is ready. He places the vessels in the furnace and watches it six days and six nights, heaping up continually fresh fuel on the fire. But the enamel does not melt. Almost in despair, he fancies that the glaze has not been furnished sufficiently with fusible substances, he pounds and pulverises more, and with them covers other vessels for which he has spent his last farthing. He waits and waits, and sees with terror that his fuel fails him. In anguish and despair he recklessly lays hands on every thing combustible that lies in his way, and casts it into the furnace. Into the fire go posts and bars, the trees of his garden, tables, chairs, the whole of his furniture. The neighbours rush in, thinking that Palissy has now indeed lost his senses and in his madness has set fire to the house. But lo! the secret has revealed itself. The enamel is molten the fool has become a Genius.

*(To be continued in the next number.)*

## SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1. Arabian. Ornament from Mosque of Sultan Hassan of Cairo.  $\frac{1}{6}$  full size.